

*STATEMENT OF
MAURICE D. WILSON
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT
OF THE
SAN DIEGO VETERANS COALITION
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Bilirakis, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of San Diego Veterans Coalition and our constituency of transitioning service members, veterans and spouses, I am pleased to testify at this hearing concerning “**Coordinating Transition.**” SDVC is dedicated to a collective purpose: helping our veterans and their families successfully transitioning from military to civilian life.

About The SDVC

Founded in 2009 and incorporated in 2012, SDVC is the premier veteran convener in San Diego County. We bring together over 150 unique organizations, businesses, and government agencies. We support these partners in their services, events and activities. SDVC also provides leadership via Action Groups in four specific areas:

- Physical and Emotional Health Action Group (PEH)
- Family Life Action Group (FLAG)
- Veterans: Empowered, Successful, and Thriving Action Group (VEST)
- Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship Action Group (E3)

Our Purpose

The purpose of the San Diego Veterans Coalition (SDVC) is to serve the needs of San Diego regional Veterans, their families and significant others. We intend to improve collaboration and coordination among community service providers in all sectors (non-profit, county, state, federal, informal councils, Veteran groups) so that delivery of services is more comprehensive and Veteran Family-centric.

Our Vision

The vision of the SDVC is to honor the nation's commitment to veterans, their families and significant others by leading collaboration among all potential partners, making the San Diego region a national model for a comprehensive, integrated system of community services.

University of San Diego. REBOOT has also successfully piloted six all-female veteran workshops to focus their program on comprehensive reintegration services for women veterans.

The Need:

Leaving the military is a significant social, psychological, and professional transition. Military service means that personal interests and ambitions are put on hold – it's essentially the leasing of a life for a period of service – sometimes for years.

Multiple and extended deployments, and the intense operational pace of the current conflicts are unparalleled for the US military's all-volunteer force. Those transitioning back into civilian life need experiences that demonstrate to them how to take their life back.

Men and women leaving active duty tell us they most want "success in real life" but anxiously need to know the answer to "who I am" and "who I can be" before they answer, "what's next?".

The VA's 2018 Military to Civilian Transition Report "*A Review of Historical, Cultural, and Future Trends*" Transition Report sums it up: "*In a November 2015 study, where more than 8,500 Veterans, active duty Service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and military dependents identified their most significant transition challenges:*"

- *60% Navigating VA programs, benefits, and services*
- *55% Finding a job*
- *41% Adjusting to civilian culture*
- *40% Addressing financial challenges*
- *39% Applying military-learned skills to civilian life*

Veteran Employment Issues

- 85% Want a complete career change
- 80% Don't know what they want to do next

Veteran Turnover is High:

- U.S Turnover - Average across all industries = 18%
- Veterans, 1st year turnover = 45% in first post-service job
- Veterans, 2nd year turnover = 65% – most have left their jobs

The Dis-connected Veteran

- Many veterans are attempting reintegration alone predisposing them to risks
- Approximately 70% of Post-9/11 Veterans not affiliated with a VSO.
- Approximately 75% of Post-9/11 Veterans are under age 45.
- Approximately 25% of Post-9/11 Veterans are of age 45

To this day, there is no collective approach to resolve these issues.

The Reintegration Challenge

Every year 250,000 military service members embark upon the transition from active military duty to civilian life. For many this is difficult process—not just a vocational change; but a multi- faceted and monumental life change. Many of our veteran heroes return home requiring unique support to ensure they successfully adapt to civilian life. Veterans report widespread prevalence of problems in social functioning, including participating in community activities, relating to spouses, and keeping a job. Symptomatic of the reintegration problem are veteran incarceration, and homeless and suicide rates twice as high as those among the general public.

The process for a service member to reintegrate as a civilian is complex, riddled with potential difficulties. These difficulties traditionally occur upon separation from military life and during a veteran’s initial transition into the civilian population. There are numerous reintegration challenges that veteran service members face when they return home:

- **Physiological and Behavioral Disorders** – Many service members return from active military duty with serious physiological and behavioral disorders. Research suggests that the burden of mental disorders and symptoms, substance use disorders, and depression are high among veterans within the first year of reintegration. It is estimated that 11-17% of the Gulf War Era veteran population will develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Mental health problems create barriers to reintegration that are difficult to overcome for some veterans.
- **Broken Identity** – Upon entry into the armed forces, service members and their families assume a new military identity. Upon return home from the armed forces, service members relinquish that identity. Once back home, soldiers may struggle with disconnecting from their military identity and soldier- comrades. They may find it difficult to make new connections with friends, family, and society
- **Cultural Gaps between Military & Civilian Life** – The differences in values between civilian society and military society create a civil military cultural gap.

Service members experiencing a difficult transition may feel misunderstood and separated from their families and communities. These feelings may exacerbate their reintegration difficulties, resulting in unhealthy behaviors.

- Loss of a structured environment – When the routine and orders are no longer part of life things can fall apart for a recently separated service member. Life may seem purposeless. One has to learn how to be self-directed and find new meaning in life, a daunting task at best without guidance and support.
- Limited Professional and Social Networks – Frequent relocation while serving in the U.S. Military makes it difficult for military personnel to establish or maintain civilian professional and social networks. Frequent moves also decrease the likelihood of an individual learning about specific career opportunities.
- Lack of Civilian Work Experience – Many enlisted service members enter the military following high school graduation and, therefore, have never experienced post-graduation civilian work. With little or no civilian work experience, some veterans reenter civilian life with minimal direction or understanding of civilian work.
- Translating military experience into civilian job skills – Some job skills acquired during military service (eg. combat arms) do not readily transfer into civilian career skills. Transitioning veterans face a difficult task, many times unguided, to translate military job skills into hireable civilian terms.

All five branches of the military are required to offer transition assistance to separating service members, and military personnel is required to participate in the United States Military Transition Assistance Program, a five-day program primarily focused on vocational preparation and placement. However, the government provides little support to assist the social identity, cultural, and psychological needs of veterans who must “unlearn” boot camp; REBOOT has a foothold on filling this gap with our highly effective REBOOT Workshops™.

Over the years SDVC through our E3 Action Group has become expert at guiding the reintegration process from military to civilian life and is the only entity that is effectively performing this service.

Addressing the GAPS In TAP

The primary focus of the TAP is the vocational preparation and placement needs of transitioning veterans. Career development curriculum and guidance has become the primary motivation, as outlined in the published career readiness standards, neglecting other important factors that aid in successful reintegration. Many veterans still struggle with deep-rooted

problems affecting their social functioning. The current TAP does not adequately provide the support for our veterans to successfully transition into civilian life.

While much support is given to career readiness through TAP, there is little support provided to assist the social identity, cultural, and psychological needs of veterans who need to “unlearn” military boot camp. Many of the problems that veterans face, including social functioning, employment issues, anger control, and spiritual struggles, fall outside the traditional scope of medical practice and transition support provided by the VA.

Currently, there are no existing courses offered by the VA that adequately address the psychological and social factors of transitioning from military to civilian life before release or immediately after. Furthermore, few programs exist that are evidence-based and designed for those who are not in formal mental health care.

Even though participation in the TAP is mandated, many transitioning service members still enter civilian life unprepared to bridge the gap between military culture and society at large.

While it is critically important to provide career transition support and guidance for our transitioning veterans, it is equally, and perhaps even more important, that they also receive support to transition their identity from military to civilian life through a required cognitive and psychological support program. A supplemental “Community-based” program to TAP is therefore needed to complement the current transition assistance provided for separating military personnel.

The Solution: SDVC Transition Integration Process (TIP)

To meet that need, SDVC’s E3 Action Group researched the best practices in transition and are implementing an integrated solution based on science and tried and tested transition programs.

With the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William "Bill" Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act serving as a foundation, the SDVC is implementing the **Transition Integration Process (TIP)**. TIP is an industry-driven, community-led initiative to REBOOT the lives and careers of transitioning service members and veterans in San Diego to promote a strong workforce.

MISSION: By focusing on and resolving the key reintegration issues of veterans and the challenges employers face trying to hire them, **TIP** will help close the reintegration gaps of veterans by orchestrating a predictable veteran talent pipeline from military service to employment in priority sectors through a coordinated training effort with multiple agencies.

TIP leverages local resources across four key transition domains: **Engagement, Transition, Workplace and Community integration**. Each domain is coordinated with SDVC community members who have been vetted and offer specific services in a particular domain so as not to over-saturate a service. Tracking is managed through a cloud-based Community Information Exchange (CIE) that monitors and tracks cohorts as they move from one service provider to another.

By working as a team, addressing transition issues in a comprehensive manner, the SDVC is able to ensure needs are met in an efficient and timely manner reducing and/or eliminating known reintegration issues at the root cause enhancing the readiness and wellness of veterans and their families.

The Challenge of Getting Veterans back to Work After COVID-19

Several workforce studies reveal that reskilling veterans will be paramount as we pull out of the COVID-19 Pandemic as noted by the following.

Before COVID-19:

The McKinsey Report reported that the U.S. is facing a critical skills shortage noting that 50% of the jobs are susceptible to AI capabilities and will displace 40% of the world's jobs.

Vox.com reported that the U.S. is experiencing a widespread worker shortage. The U.S. economy had 7.6 million unfilled jobs, but only 6.5 million people were looking for work.

Genesis10.com reporting on the Davos 2019 Conference that the "*Skills Gap is Sizeable, but Reskilling Brightens Jobs Outlook.*" The report finds that by 2025, while the shifting division of labor between humans, machines and algorithms may displace 75 million jobs, and another 133 million roles may emerge that are more adapted to the new division of labor.

After COVID-19:

Most of the trends that were in place are getting stronger and vulnerable businesses that were becoming less relevant by the day have been made irrelevant or are literally gone

Today that means two radical shifts for the future of work:

- **Information and education, once scarce and inaccessible, is now abundant and accessible and**

- **Technology can now scale faster than human beings can learn.**

The results of those shifts are that the half-life of your knowledge and skills is getting shorter and shorter, which has led to a massive global skills gap and created an immense pressure on companies and individuals to be continuously learning and upskilling.

But going back to school two or four years at a time is not a model that is efficient over a lifetime of learning, or one that can move fast enough to satiate the demands that companies have for talent.

In a recent article, **Bill Gates** cited that America will lose over 250 million jobs requiring a massive re-skilling initiative in new jobs.

So how will this impact veterans?

Until and unless we address the known reintegration challenges mentioned earlier in my testimony of resolving known reintegration challenges, attempting to re-skill veterans for the post-COVID-19 Pandemic, without addressing known reintegration issues, may result in an increase in veteran unemployment - the evidence suggest that veterans need a coordinate approach to reintegration beyond that which is offered in the traditional TAP.

In light of this need, the SDVC calls on Congress to support the rapid implementation of HR 2326 introduced by Congressman Mark Levin calling for the formation of off-base, Community-led Transition Centers to help address reintegration issues.

This will enable local communities to orchestrate resources, coordinate training with local educational institutions, engage employers, and build viable local economies through small business development. But most important, it will help veterans and their families successfully reintegrate into a new life of their choosing by addressing reintegration issues versus reacting to them.

I leave you with this quote from the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chairman's Office of Reintegration: Veterans / Families / Communities, of September 2015:

“As a nation, we cannot meet our full potential in reintegrating veterans and their families back into civilian society unless the military, government, non-profits, veteran-serving organizations, and private partners collaborate around a mutual agenda and partner to address the challenges veterans face in reintegration.”

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

